



# Review of the Use and Utility of Centralised Evaluations – Selected highlights of the report

## Why was the review conducted?

The Development Evaluation Unit (EVA-11) of the Finnish Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA) commissioned an independent review to assess use and utility of different types of evaluations, meta-evaluations and reviews that the EVA-11 has carried out in 2015-2022. The intention was to find out how evaluation information is used for decision making, learning and accountability and how to enhance the use and utility of strategic, policy level evaluations.

### Strengths of the evaluation process

- Annual Evaluation Plans are prepared in a consultative manner.
- Types of evaluations have become more diverse, e.g. reviews have been adopted for producing evaluative information.
- Attention to coherence between development policy and foreign policy and/or trade policy has improved.
- Outsourced Evaluation Management Service arrangement produces standard quality.
- Opportunities for the MFA staff to participate in the evaluations exist.
- Reports contain a lot of information and are of high technical quality.

### Weaknesses of the evaluation process

- The evaluations commissioned by the EVA-11 take approximately two years from the idea to results being available.
- Evaluation results have not always been available when needed.

- The reports are not appealing to potential users and sharing of evaluation results is not responding to stakeholder needs.
- Interested users of evaluations do not know where to find the evaluation reports and knowledge products.
- Past evaluations are forgotten too quickly.
- The evaluations are not taken up in the Management Teams or by the Offices of the Ministers. Thus, the MFA leadership does not generate knowledge from evaluations.
- Management response is used for the uptake of evaluation results, but the process is not working well.
- Evaluation use and utility has focused on recommendations of evaluations with less emphasis on findings and conclusions.
- Evaluation culture is not fully developed across all departments in the Ministry.
- Focus on individual training and learning is not effective in fostering knowledge-based management in the Ministry.

## Have the evaluations been transformative?

In general, people both in and outside of the Ministry consider the evaluation reports useful. Many **evaluations have influenced policies, guidelines and processes of development cooperation**. The **influence on policy dialogue is limited** because evaluations are not discussed in the Parliament or in the Development Policy Committee. The departments and units responsible for development policy and development cooperation discuss and utilise evaluations.

## What happens to the evaluation recommendations?

Decisions about the use of evaluation results take place in the **management response** process. However, the process is **not fit to address the recommendations that transgress the institutional boundaries** in the Ministry, focuses mostly on recommendations with less attention to findings, and all centralised evaluation results are processed in the same way without considering how operational or strategic the recommendations are. Evaluation results mutually accepted during the evaluation process lead into changes in any case. **Institutional, strategic or policy coherence issues cannot be properly addressed** by a process that only reaches the level of departments. At present the evaluations are not discussed at the Management Teams of the Ministry or with the Offices of the Ministers.

## Who owns the evaluations?

The use and utility of the evaluation and what role they will play in transforming the MFA is ultimately **in the hands of the people who are expected to embrace and own the results and apply** them in learning and knowledge-based management. In this respect, leadership services both from the political and public servant leaders of the Ministry have been in short supply.

## How to improve communication?

The evaluation reports are a source of information and knowledge. Use of evaluations would be facilitated if the **reports would be more easily available, if they were available in a timely manner, and if the results are summarized well**. The EVA-11 is responsible for disseminating development evaluation results although the Unit is not alone responsible for facilitating learning from evaluations. There is a need to find mutual understanding on how to move on together with learning approach in the Ministry. The EVA-11 has seats in the right tables and can improve sharing of evaluation results inside and outside the MFA.

## How to better capture knowledge and learning?

Important institutional issues came up in many evaluations. Knowledge-based leadership services are needed to ensure that the whole organisation is operating for the wellbeing of people in the MFA and that they can provide their full potential to their duties and tasks. **Improving knowledge-based management and learning from evaluations in the Ministry calls for an improvement in learning approach**: collective learning approach instead of training and providing information for individuals needs to be adopted. Learning objectives should be integrated with the MFA performance management procedures when strengthening the learning culture of MFA. Learning objectives should be set at individual, team and unit level. The attention of the MFA leadership is needed on this kind of system level development.

## What improvements can be made?

The review made the following recommendations to the Development Evaluation Unit:

1. In spring 2023, engage the new Ministers and people in their Offices and raise their interest in the significance of the centralised evaluations;
2. Constantly share evaluation information with the Offices of the Ministers, Ministry's Management Teams and Development Policy Steering Group;
3. Initiate a process of rethinking and revising the management response process;
4. Improve the information sharing about the evaluations to respond to the varied needs of different stakeholders;
5. Prioritise collective learning-oriented methods in engaging the MFA stakeholders;
6. Increase flexibility in planning and diversity of evaluations.



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